AM50 Badaga AM50

control on quality and could bring together sufficient produce to make a transaction with an exporter worthwhile. As more and more Badagas became interested in growing cash crops, middlemen appeared not only to buy up small quantities of tea, coffee and potato but also to sell seed, fertilizer and even some insurance.

After Independence profiteering by the middlemen was largely checked by the Nilgiri Cooperative Marketing Society set up with state government aid (Vivekanandam Pillai, 1937, 249). Today there are nearly two hundred cooperative societies in the Nilgiris which pool the resources of members and also supply cheap fertilizer. Many such societies own local tea-processing factories and warehouses and are dominated by Badugas. After 1957 heavy loss through potato disease caused a widespread shift to tea or coffee growing,[22] and in the 1970s large acreages have been devoted to growing a sturdy new German variety of cabbage which finds markets nation-wide. Both tea and cabbage are quite successful crops. The availability of help from the Central Cooperative Bank made these unexpected switches in crops possible, for otherwise the initial capital outlay and the small size of most estates would have rendered the new venture unfeasible. Several cottage industries have also helped diversify the rural economy over the past thirty years; in particular beekeeping, liquor distilling, milk sales, knitting and embroidery have provided new, regular sources of income for many hundreds of Badaga families.

The early twentieth century saw the rise not only of wealthy Badaga land-owners but also of large-scale labour contractors. A few men profitted by getting the contracts for gangs to dig pits for planting tea-cuttings, pick coffee-beans, build roads or construct public buildings in the district.[23] Less wealthy Badagas set themselves up as small shopkeepers, tailors or money-lenders or found work in a wide variety of urban trades.[24] Whenever possible the more resourceful reinvested their profits in land (Ranga, 1934, 10), either tea and coffee estates or farm plots formerly belonging to Kotas (Mandelbaum, 1955, 240). The other reinvestment commonly made was in college education for their sons. With the economy fully monetized the stress was now on providing stability for the coming generations.

MODERN EMPLOYMENT

Prior to World War I virtually all Badagas were cultivators, and

241 has greatly improved, it is worth noting, because the state government has made loans available on relatively easy terms for the purpose of having field terraces constructed.

Because of terracing in many places, and widespread subdivision, fields are often so small that it would be markedly inefficient to plow them at any time (Ranga 1934: 12-13; Vivekanandam Pillai 1937: 249). For the past 25 years, therefore, the plow and oxen have ceased to be used in the Nilgiri Hills. Much of the work-load formerly carried by oxen is now taken by the spades of cheap migrant laborers from the plains: men work for daily wages of Rs. 1.75, equivalent to about 35¢ U.S., and women for about 30¢.

While the profits from potato, tea and coffee are very much higher per acre than those from the traditional grain crops, the risks are also much higher. Not only does a farmer need ready cash to buy seed or cuttings, fertilizer and labor, but he may need cash to feed his family if disease ruins the crop for one season. Here the cooperative societies set up by the state government have helped the Badagas greatly. Both short- and long-term loans are available, against land or house securities, for all members of the societies (Vivekanandam Pillai 1937: 249). The societies have thus gone far in protecting Badagas from the high interest-rates of private money-lenders; some societies even help farmers by supplying seeds, fertilizers, and modern implements at cost prices.

Marketing

Traditionally the Badagas, Kotas and Todas occupied a very peripheral position in a market economy: before the British reached the Nilgiris annual trading expeditions to the market at Gundlupet, in Mysore, or to KErramadai, were the source for the few requirements not otherwise available in the Hills. Such

178 greater agricultural skill than other Nilgiri crops if they are to attain the high standards required by company purchasing agents. Moreover, they need to be produced in large enough quantity to warrant the processing and transportation to Bombay.

178 Middlemen, both Badagas and others, were therefore indispensible to the few Bada-
442 gas who had ventured into tea and coffee growing in the 1920's and 1930's. Middle-
(241) men could act as a control on quality, and could amass sufficient produce to make a transaction with an exporter worth-while. As more and more Badagas became interested in growing crops for cash, middlemen appeared not only to buy small quantities of tea, coffee and potatoes, but also to act as agents in selling seeds and fertilizers, and even insurance.

After Independence the profiteering in which these middlemen had indulged
• 474 was finally checked. With state and central government aid, marketing cooperatives
(442) were set up in various parts of the Nilgiris to undermine the position of the middle-
(657) men by providing cheaper services (Vivekanandam Kiki 1957: 249). Now there are cooperative societies which not only find markets and pool the resources of members, but provide cheap seeds, fertilizers and implements. Many such societies now own local tea-processing factories or warehouses.

Since 1957 heavy loss through potato disease has caused some of the
241 potato-growers to plant their land with tea or coffee instead. The availability of help from the marketing cooperatives has made this sudden switch in crops possible, for otherwise the initial capital outlay and the small size of most estates would make the whole venture unfeasible.

Communications

489 Steady improvements in the transportation systems have facilitated the
(518) production and sale of cash crops. In the last century all goods had to be carried

177 Until the end of the last century Badagas sedulously avoided the British
178 legal system and its officers. The traditional Badaga system, which we described
earlier (pp. 29-43), continued to operate effectively. In the following chapter we
121 shall describe the social change which came about during the present century when
Badagas were obliged to adapt their legal system so as to make use of the official
Indian one too.

Local government under the British was in practice confined for the most
657 part to the municipalities. Some police stations were established in rural areas,
(631) and local roads were constructed; but in general there was little attempt to im-
(625) prove the lot of the Badagas. In a few villages the presence of free mission
(871) schools from 1857 onward nevertheless did much to raise the standard of educa-
tion (cf. Grigg 1880: 423-24).

After Independence, on the other hand, the Indian government began to
pay a great deal of attention to developing the rural sector of the country. The
Nilgiris was not selected for inclusion in the areas subjected to intensive commu-
nity development in the early 1950's, but local panchayat offices were set up in the
administrative "villages" of the Nilgiris, and began the dissemination of informa-
tion and the improvement of basic services. The Badagas were classified as a
"Backward Class" and received special help in these matters from the Harijan
(312) Welfare Department. Today most villages, as a result of these efforts, have a
(491) fairly hygienic supply of running tap-water, a track connecting them with the main
(365) roads, and an electricity supply. Many villages have started their own coopera-
(474) tive society, through which they get loans and agricultural supplies against the
security of their lands or houses.

177 Certain pieces of legislation often regarded as milestones in the recent